

VZCZCXRO2825
PP RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #0945/01 1771329
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 251329Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1161
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTTF HOA
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0072
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0249
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 0081
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 0240

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 000945

AIDAC
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, S/CRS, PRM, AF SE WILLIAMSON
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SP, USAID/W DCHA SUDAN
NAIROBI FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA, USAID/REDSO
FAS GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
NAIROBI FOR SFO
NSC FOR PMARCHAM, MMAGAN, AND BPITTMAN
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
NEW YORK FOR FSHANKS
BRUSSELS FOR PBROWN
USMISSION UN ROME FOR RNEWBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [UN](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: ABYEI IDPS: HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

REFS: A) KHARTOUM 0540 B) KHARTOUM 0807

KHARTOUM 00000945 001.2 OF 003

1. Begin Summary: On June 20 and 21, a team from USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) conducted a follow-up assessment of Agok area, where an estimated 27,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Abyei have been displaced to since mid-May. The USAID team reported an improvement in the living situation for the majority of the Abyei IDPs due to the provision of relief commodities including plastic sheeting and household items. While the humanitarian response has met the immediate needs of the IDPs through the provision of food aid, relief commodities, and safe drinking water, the USAID team noted that the malnutrition problem reported during the first USAID assessment (REF B) has not been resolved and is now particularly worrisome. Despite the recent signing of the Abyei roadmap agreement, relief agencies, community leaders, and IDPs do not believe that the IDPs in Agok town will return to Abyei very soon. IDPs and community leaders listed several preconditions for voluntary IDP return to Abyei, including a stable security situation, the presence of UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and instructions to return from the government. End Summary.

THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE ONE MONTH ON

2. During the USAID team's visits to IDP sites around the Agok area, the team noted that most displaced families had constructed shelters using plastic sheets, poles, and other locally available materials. NGOs reported that all IDP families had received at least one package of relief commodities, including mats, cooking pots, blankets, water containers, and mosquito nets. However, a second distribution of key items, particularly plastic sheeting, would assist the households in strengthening and expanding the shelters to withstand heavy seasonal rains. With USAID/OFDA funding, Mercy Corps is constructing approximately 400 semi-permanent shelters for vulnerable families, using poles and plastic sheeting donated from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). In addition, GOAL is planning to

construct a household latrine for each new shelter.

¶3. The USAID team visited two food distribution sites where relief workers were distributing one-month rations that included USAID-donated sorghum, pulses, and vegetable oil. The food distribution is managed by Save the Children/US (SC/US) and the UN World Food Program (WFP). USAID staff report that the observed food distributions were orderly and well organized. Because the roads are already muddy and will become impassable due to the seasonal rains, implementing partners plan to distribute two-month food rations to remote IDP sites.

¶4. Relief agencies have made progress in constructing emergency latrines and increasing access to safe drinking water. However, additional latrines are needed to ensure improved sanitation in the overcrowded IDP sites. Health services provided by the Ministry of Health, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), and USAID partner GOAL are meeting the needs of the population. SC/US is actively assisting unaccompanied children to locate families and is planning to establish three child-friendly spaces in and around Agok, with USAID support.

¶5. Although coordination is strong among NGOs in Agok, coordination between UN agencies and NGOs needs strengthening. (Note: Rapid turnover of key UN agency staff that are technical sector leads, has frustrated NGO staff who have to brief incoming UN staff and repeatedly provide information on their activities. End Note.)

¶6. In addition to meeting the most urgent, immediate needs of the Abyei IDPs, relief agencies have initiated additional projects, including livelihood programs and activities for children and youth, to help normalize the lives of the Abyei IDPs. Dry spells during June enabled relief agencies to access all IDP sites and pre-position food and medicine for the upcoming rainy season.

KHARTOUM 00000945 002.2 OF 003

MALNUTRITION CONTINUES TO INCREASE

¶7. The humanitarian community's major concern remains the high levels of malnutrition among the Abyei IDPs. Fully understanding the causes and extent of the malnutrition problem is difficult because a general nutrition survey has not yet been conducted. At the onset of the Abyei crisis, malnutrition was already a concern for humanitarian agencies (REF B). However, most humanitarian staff believed that once the food aid reached the affected communities, the nutrition situation would improve. Despite successful food distributions, the trend in malnutrition has not improved, according to MSF and GOAL.

¶8. MSF staff have confirmed a significant malnutrition problem among Abyei IDPs, even though no official survey is available. The three GOAL clinics that are currently serving IDPs are referring 2 to 3 cases of severe malnutrition to MSF each day, a trend that was not present before the arrival of the IDPs. For cases of moderate malnutrition, GOAL and MSF, the primary health NGOs in Agok, provide plumpy nut, a peanut butter-like ready-to-use product that is high in calories and nutritional value. During the week of June 30, MSF is planning to conduct a nutrition survey among the population to identify the underlying causes of the increased malnutrition. Prior to the results of the survey, MSF plans to assist the severely malnourished by opening a 100-bed therapeutic feeding center in Agok. In addition, GOAL and MSF have increased outreach to IDP households and active screening for children under the age of five. MSF reports that many malnourished children are not being brought to the health facilities, making house-to-house outreach and screening important.

¶9. Currently, humanitarian agencies do not know the exact cause of the malnutrition problem among Abyei IDPs. Field staff noted that the origin of the continuing deterioration of the nutrition situation it is uncertain, particularly as NGOs report that communities are getting food assistance. MSF and GOAL have not seen high levels of diarrhea or measles among the population, factors

that often contribute to malnutrition. Health agencies on the ground concur about the existence of a problem and are scaling up emergency response programs to treat the malnutrition cases, but still have not identified the root cause of the problem. WFP is considering providing a blanket supplementary feeding for children under five years of age. Finding a way to reverse the increasing trend in malnutrition among the population will require further analysis and attention.

RETURN TO ABYEI UNCERTAIN

¶10. USAID interviewed UN and NGO staff, community leaders, and several IDPs in the Agok area, who all told the team the IDPs in Agok are not planning on returning to Abyei in the near future. Despite the signing of the Abyei Road Map, Abyei IDPs are wary of the nascent agreement and plan to wait and see if security returns and if the Sudanese Armed Forces withdraw from the town. The IDP community is still traumatized from the fighting and the subsequent displacement.

¶11. Aid agencies report that some IDPs, mostly men, have made go-and-see visits to areas north of the River Kiir to check on the status of their communities. At the time of the USAID visit, there was no indication that a large-scale voluntary return by the IDP community was likely to occur in the coming weeks or months. Relief workers predict that some of the villages south of Abyei and north of the River Kiir will be the first sites of return, as the villages south of Abyei are believed to be less damaged and potentially easier for community returns. In addition, IDPs who initially fled to Turalei, Wau, or Bentiu have returned to Agok to await the time

KHARTOUM 00000945 003.2 OF 003

that return to Abyei is possible, according to relief agencies.

¶12. The humanitarian community awaits a UN-led interagency humanitarian assessment to Abyei before NGOs can make decisions about whether to return and how to position humanitarian operations in the new context. Humanitarian agencies, including GOAL, SC/US, MSF, Mercy Corps, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, plan to position themselves where the IDPs are and focus on meeting the needs of IDPs. Even if Abyei opens up to aid agencies, many humanitarian organizations may remain positioned in Agok if that is where the IDP populations opt to remain.

Comments

¶13. The political pressure for Abyei IDPs to return to Abyei quickly is likely to be high in the coming weeks, particularly if the peace agreement continues to progress. As the way forward on Abyei is planned, humanitarian agencies and donors must keep the international principles of return in mind. International principles stipulate that returns must be voluntary and dignified and return to destinations safe and suitable for habitation.

¶14. Embassy Khartoum will continue to closely follow the humanitarian response and continue working with partners on the ground to ensure that IDP needs are met. USAID will remain engaged on the Khartoum-based UN planning process for reconstruction and return to Abyei. Post is concerned about the elevated malnutrition rates among Abyei IDPs and will continue to investigate the underlying causes. We will continue to urge early progress on the full implementation of the Abyei Road Map agreement and monitor the political context in which the humanitarian response to the needs of Abyei IDPs operates.

FERNANDEZ